

Long the Tsar sat lonely, brooding. But he, too, was only human. Tears for one sad year he shed... And another woman wed. She (if one be strictly truthful) Was a born Tsaritsa—youthful, Slim, tall, fair to look upon, Clever, witty—and so on. But she was in equal measure Stubborn, haughty, wilful, jealous. In her dowry rich and vast Was a little looking-glass. It had this unique distinction: It could speak with perfect diction. Only with this glass would she In a pleasant humour be. Many times a day she'd greet it And coquettishly entreat it: "Tell me, pretty looking-glass, Nothing but the truth, I ask: Who in all the world is fairest And has beauty of the rarest?" And the looking-glass replied: "You, it cannot be denied. You in all the world are fairest And your beauty is the rarest." The Tsaritsa laughed with glee, Shrugged her shoulders merrily, Puffed her cheeks and bat her eyelids, Flicked her fingers coyly, slyly, Pranced around with hand on hips, Arrogance upon her lips.



All this time the Tsar's own daughter Quietly, as Nature taught her, Grew and grew, and came quite soon Like a flower into bloom:
Raven-browed, of fair complexion, Breathing kindness and affection.
And the choice of fiancé
Lighted on Prince Yelisei.
Suit was made. The Tsar consented And her dowry was indented:
Seven towns with wealthy store, Mansion-houses—sevenscore.

On the night before the wedding For a bridal party dressing The Tsaritsa, time to pass, Chatted with her looking-glass: "Who in all the world is fairest And has beauty of the rarest?" Then what did the glass reply? "You are fair, I can't deny." But the Princess is the fairest And her beauty is the rarest." Up the proud Tsaritsa jumped. On the table how she thumped, Angrily the mirror slapping, Slipper heel in fury tapping! "O you loathsome looking-glass, Telling lies as bold as brass! By what right is she my rival? Such young folly I shall bridle. So she's grown up—me to spite! Little wonder she's so white: With her bulging mother gazing At that snow—what's so amazing!

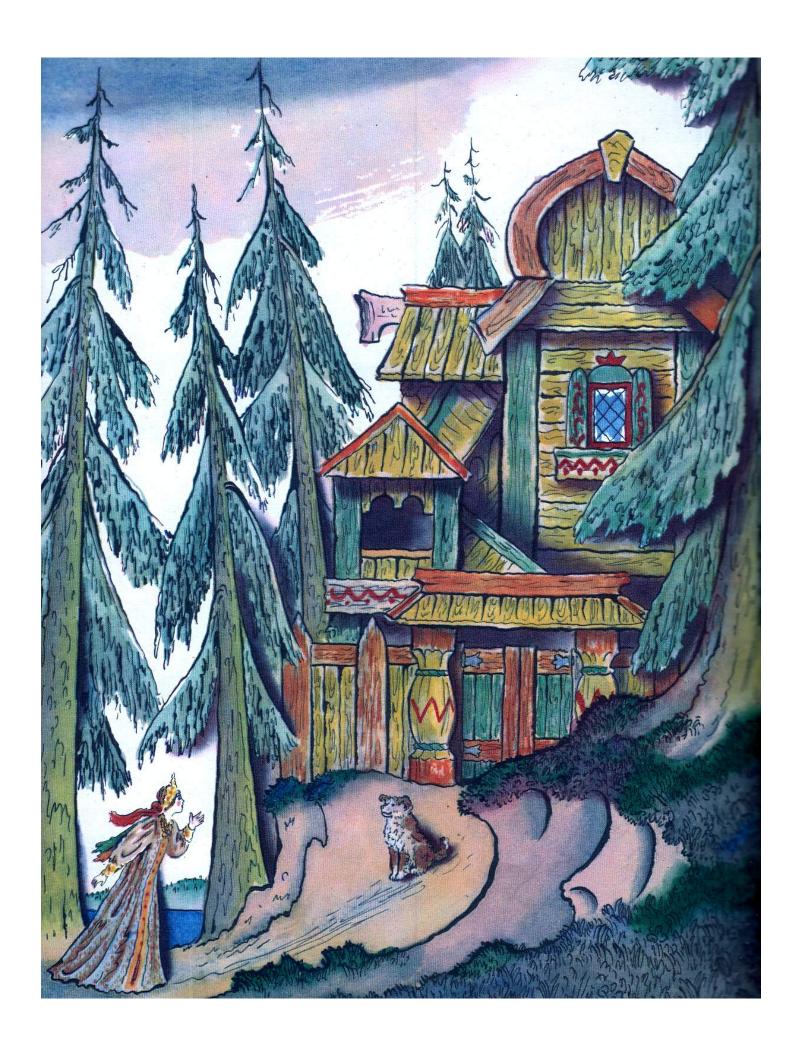
Now look here, explain to me How can she the fairer be? Scour this realm of ours and seek well. Nowhere shall you find my equal. Is not that the truth?" she cried. Still the looking-glass replied: "But the Princess is the fairest And her beauty is the rarest." The Tsaritsa burst with spite, Hurled the mirror out of sight Underneath the nearest cupboard And when breath she had recovered Summoned Smudge, her chamber maid, And to her instructions gave: "Take the Princess to the forest, Bind her hand and foot and forehead To a tree! When wolves arrive Let them eat the girl alive!"





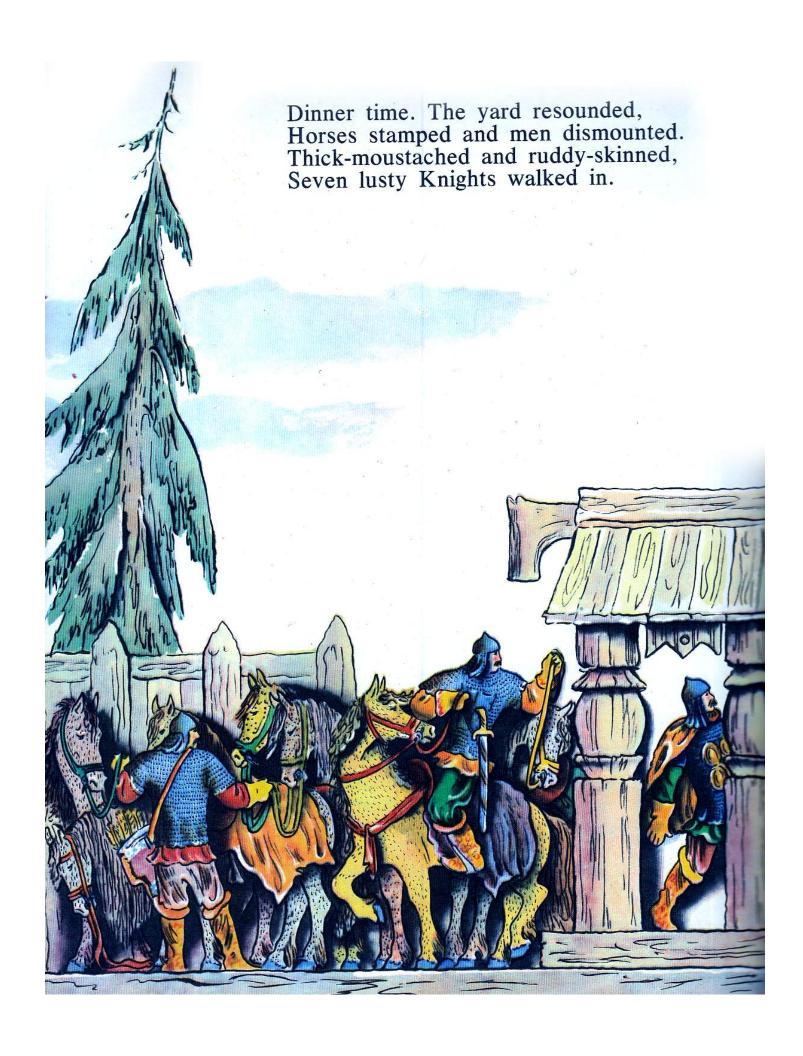
Woman's wrath would daunt the devil! Protest was no use whatever. Soon the Princess left with Smudge For the woods. So far they trudged That the Princess guessed the reason. Scared to death by such foul treason, Loud she pleaded: "Spare my life! Innocent of guilt am I! Do not kill me, I beseech you! And when I become Tsaritsa I shall give you rich reward." Smudge, who really loved her ward, Being loth to kill or bind her, Let her go, remarking kindly: "God be with you! Do not moan!" And, this said, went back alone. "Well?" demanded the Tsaritsa, "Where's that pretty little creature?" "In the forest on her own," Smudge replied. "And there she'll stay. To a tree I firmly lashed her. When a hungry beast attacks her She'll have little time to cry And the quicker she shall die!"

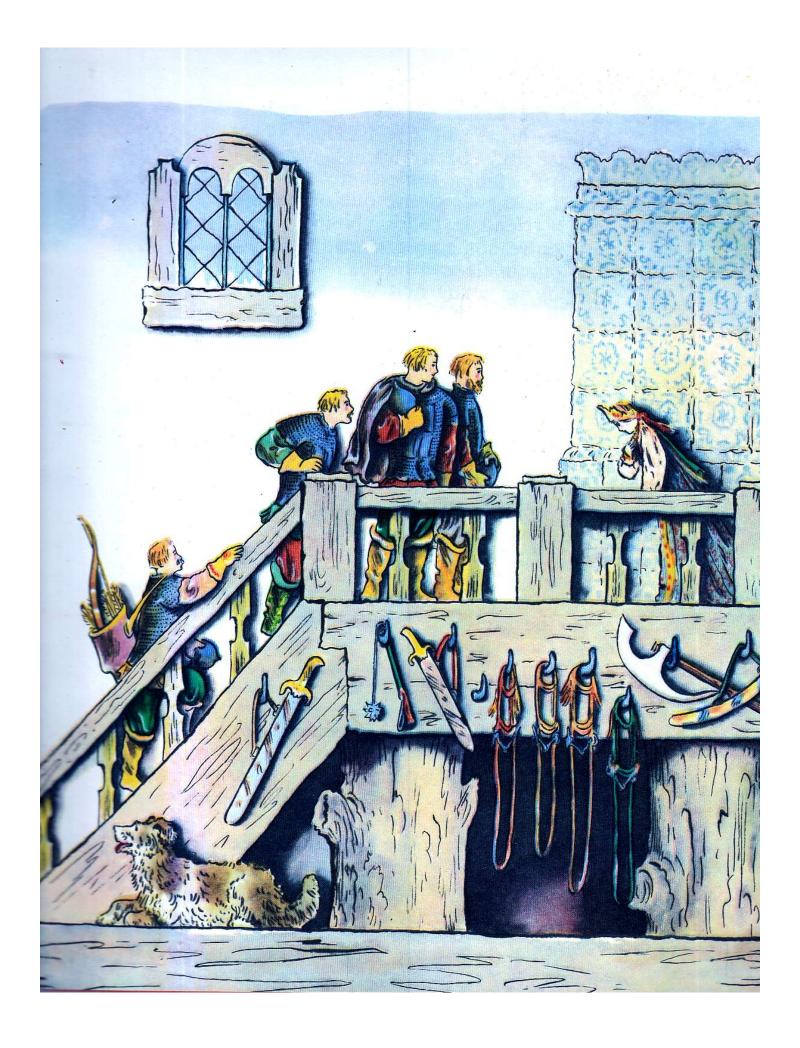
Rumour spread and caused a panic:
"What, the Tsar's own daughter vanished!"
Mournful was the Tsar that day.
But the young Prince Yelisei
Offered God a fervent prayer
And departed then and there
To seek out and homeward guide
His sweet-tempered, youthful bride.





Meanwhile his young bride kept walking Through the forest until morning, Vague as to her whereabouts. Suddenly she spied a house. Out a dog ran growling, yapping, Then sat down, his tail tap-tapping. At the gate there was no guard. All was quiet in the yard. Close at heel the good dog bounded As the Princess slowly mounted Stairs to gain the living floor, Turned the ring upon the door. Silently the door swung open And before her eyes unfolded A bright chamber: all around Benches strewn with rugs she found, Board of oak beneath the ikon And a stove with tiles to lie on. To the Princess it was clear Kindly folk were dwelling here Who would not deny her shelter. No-one was at home, however. So she set to, cleaned the pans, Made the whole house spick and span, Lit a candle in the corner. Fed the fire to be warmer, Climbed onto the platform bed There to lay her sleepy head.





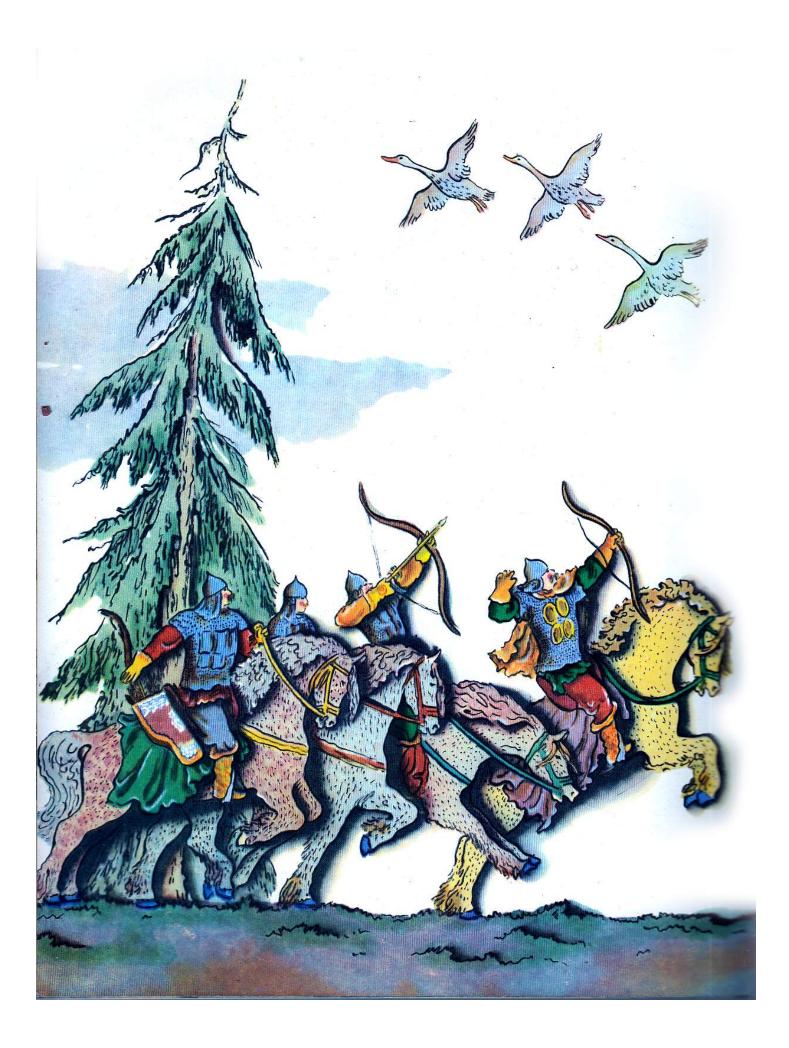
Said the Eldest: "How amazing!
All so neat! The fire blazing!
Somebody's been cleaning here
And is waiting somewhere near.
Who is there? Come out of hiding!
Be a friend in peace abiding!
If you're someone old and hoar,
Be our uncle evermore!
If you're young and love a scuffle,
We'll embrace you as a brother.
If a venerable dame,
Then shall 'mother' be your name.
If a maiden fair, we'll call you
Our dear sister and adore you."

So the Princess rose, came down To the Seven Knights and bowed, Her good wishes emphasising, Blushing and apologising That to their delightful home Uninvited she had come. Straight they saw her speech bore witness To the presence of a Princess. So they cleared a corner seat, Offered her a pie with meat, Filled a glass with wine and served it On a tray, as she deserved it. But the glass of heady wine She politely did decline And the pie she broke with caution, Savouring a tiny portion. Pleading she was very tired, Soon she gracefully retired And the Seven Knights conveyed her To the best and brightest chamber

And, away as they did creep, She was falling fast asleep.



Days flew by—the Princess living All the time without misgiving In the forest, never bored With the Seven Knights abroad. Darkness would the earth still cover When at dawn the seven brothers Would ride out to try their luck With a long-bow, shooting duck, Or to ply their sword in battle And a Saracen unsaddle, Headlong at a Tartar go, Chop his head off at a blow, Or give chase to a Circassian, From the forest send him dashing.





She, as lady of the house, Rose much later, moved about Dusting, polishing and cooking, Never once the Knights rebuking. They, too, never chided her. Days flew by like gossamer.

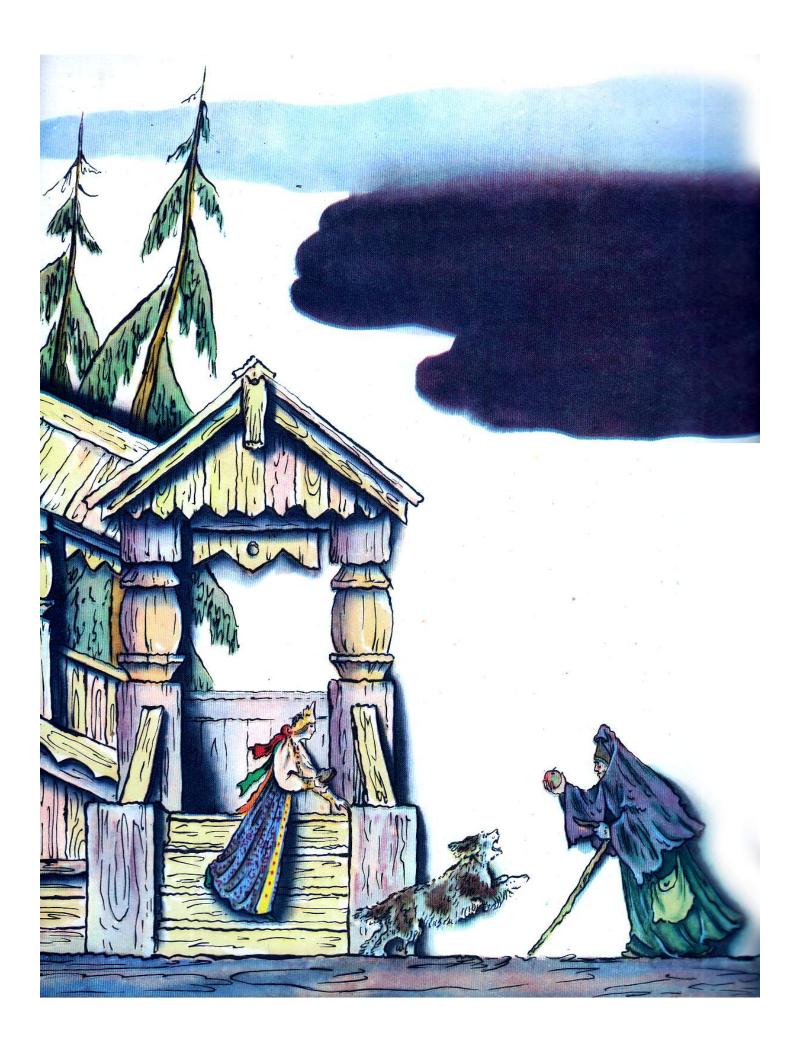
And in time they grew to love her. Thereupon all seven brothers Shortly after dawn one day To her chamber made their way And the Eldest Knight addressed her: "As you know, you are our sister. But all seven of us here Are in love with you, my dear, And we all desire your favours. But that must not be, God save us! Find some way to give us peace! Be a wife to one at least, To the rest remain a sister! But you shake your head. Is this to Say our offer you refuse? Nothing from our stock you'll choose?"

"O my brave and bonny brothers, Virtuous beyond all others!"
In reply the Princess said, "God in heaven strike me dead If my answer be not honest: I've no choice—my hand is promised! You're all equal in my eyes, All so valiant and wise, And I love you all, dear brothers!

But my heart is to another Pledged for evermore. One day I shall wed Prince Yelisei!"

Hushed, the brothers kept their station, Scratched their foreheads in frustration. "As you wish! So now we know," Said the Eldest with a bow. "Pray forgive us—and I promise You'll hear nothing further from us!" "I'm not angry," she replied. "By my pledge I must abide." Bowing low, the seven suitors Left her room with passions muted. So in harmony again Did they live and friendship reign.

The Tsaritsa was still livid Every time she saw in vivid Memory the Princess fair. Long the mirror, lying there, Was the object of her hatred: But at last her wrath abated. So one day it came to pass That she took the looking-glass Up again and sat before it, Smiled and, as before, implored it: "Greetings, pretty looking-glass! Tell me all the truth, I ask: Who in all the world is fairest And has beauty of the rarest?" Said the mirror in reply: "You are fair, I can't deny.



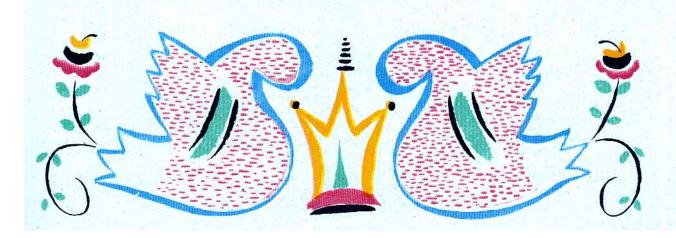
But where Seven Knights go riding In a green oak-grove residing Humbly lives a person who Is more beautiful than you." The Tsaritsa's wrath descended On her maid: "What folly tempted You to lie? You disobeyed!" Smudge a full confession made.... Uttering a threat of torture, The Tsaritsa grimly swore to Send the Princess to her death Or not draw another breath.



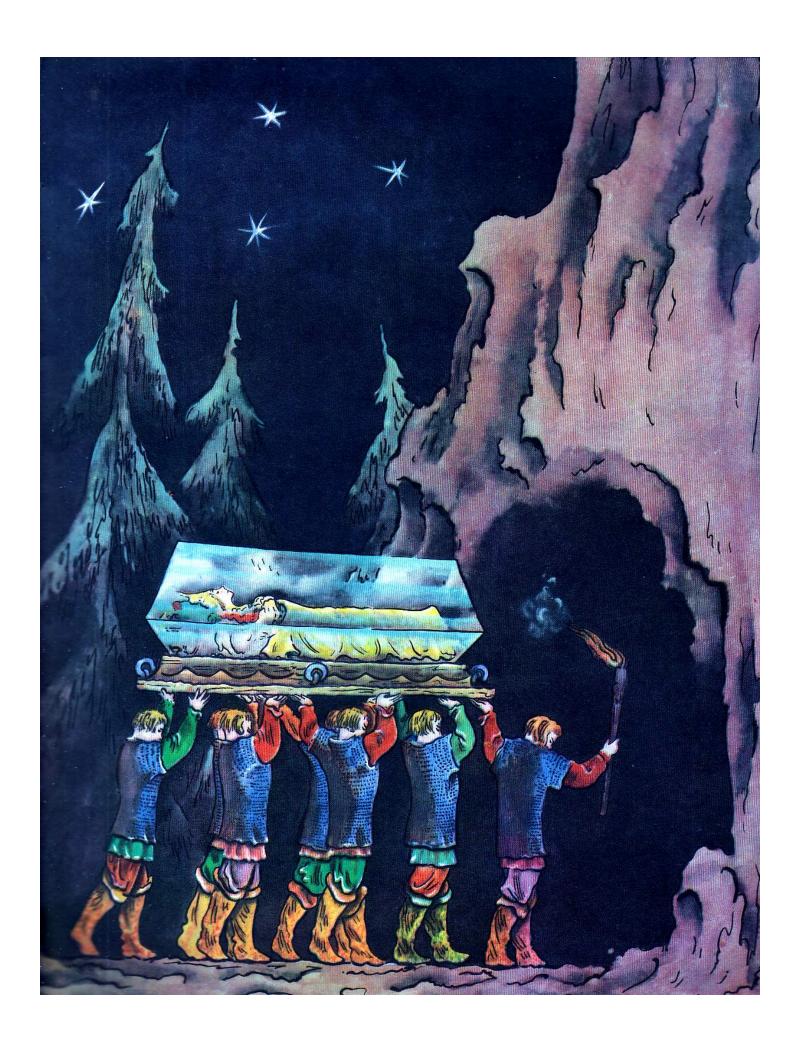
One day by her window waiting
For her brothers homeward hasting
Sat the young Princess and span.
Suddenly the dog began
Barking. Through the courtyard scurried
A poor beggar-woman, worried
By the dog she kept at bay
With her stick. "Don't go away!
Stay there, stay!" the Princess shouted,
From the window leaning outward.
"Let me call the dog to heel
And I'll offer you a meal."

And the beggar-woman answered: "Pretty child, you take my fancy! For that dog of yours, you see, Could well be the death of me. See him snarling, bristling yonder! Come here, child!" The Princess wanted To go out, and took a loaf. But the dog its body wove Round her feet, refused to let her Step towards the woman-beggar. When the woman, too, drew near, Wilder than an angry bear It attacked her. How perplexing! "Had a bad night's sleep, I reckon!" Said the Princess. "Catch it! There!" And the bread flew through the air. The poor beggar-woman caught it. "I most humbly thank you, daughter, God be merciful!" said she. "In return take this from me!" The bright apple she was holding, Newly picked, fresh, ripe and golden, Straight towards the Princess flew.... How the dog leapt in pursuit! But the Princess neatly trapped it In her palms. "Enjoy the apple At your leisure, little pet! Thank you for the loaf of bread...," Said the beggar-woman, brandished In the air her stick and vanished.... Up the stairs the Princess ran With the dog, which then began Pitifully staring, whining Just as if its heart were pining For the gift of speech to say:

"Throw that apple far away!" Hastily his neck she patted: "Hev. Sokolko, what's the matter? Lie down!" Entering once more Her own room, she shut the door, Sat there with her spindle humming, Waiting for her brothers' coming. But she could not take her gaze From the apple where it lay Full of fragrance, rosy, glowing, Fresh and juicy, ripe and golden, Sweet as honey to the lips! She could even see the pips.... First the Princess thought of waiting Until dinner. But temptation Proved too strong. She grasped the bright Apple, took a stealthy bite And with fair cheek sweetly hollowed A delicious morsel swallowed. All at once her breathing stopped, Listlessly her white arms dropped. From her lap the rosy apple Tumbled to the floor. The hapless Maiden closed her swooning eyes, Reeled and fell without a cry, On the bench her forehead striking, Then lay still beneath the ikon....



Now the brothers, as it chanced, Were returning in a band From another warlike foray. Out to meet them in the forest Went the dog and, running hard, Led them straight into the yard. Said the Knights: "An evil omen! Grief in store!" The door they opened, Walked into the room and gasped. But the dog like lightning dashed For the apple and devoured it. Death that instant overpowered it. For the apple was, they saw, Filled with poison to the core. By the dead Princess the brothers Bent their heads in tears and uttered Holy prayer to save her soul; Nothing could their grief console. From the bench they raised her, dressed her, Wished within a grave to rest her, Then had second thoughts. For she Was as rosy as if sleep Garlands of repose were wreathing Round her—though she was not breathing. Three whole days they waited, but Still her eyes were tightly shut. So that night with solemn ritual In a coffin made of crystal They laid out the body fair Of the Princess and from there To a hollow mountain bore her, Where a tomb they fashioned for her: Iron chains they used to fix Her glass case to pillars six With due caution, and erected Iron railings to protect it.



"Sun, dear Sun! The whole year coursing Through the sky, in springtime thawing From the chill earth winter snow! You observe us all below. Surely you'll not grudge an answer? Tell me, did you ever chance to See the Princess I revere? I'm her fiancé." "My dear," Said the Sun with some insistence, "I have nowhere seen your Princess, So she's dead, we must presume, That is, if my friend, the Moon, Has not met her on his travels Or seen clues you may unravel."



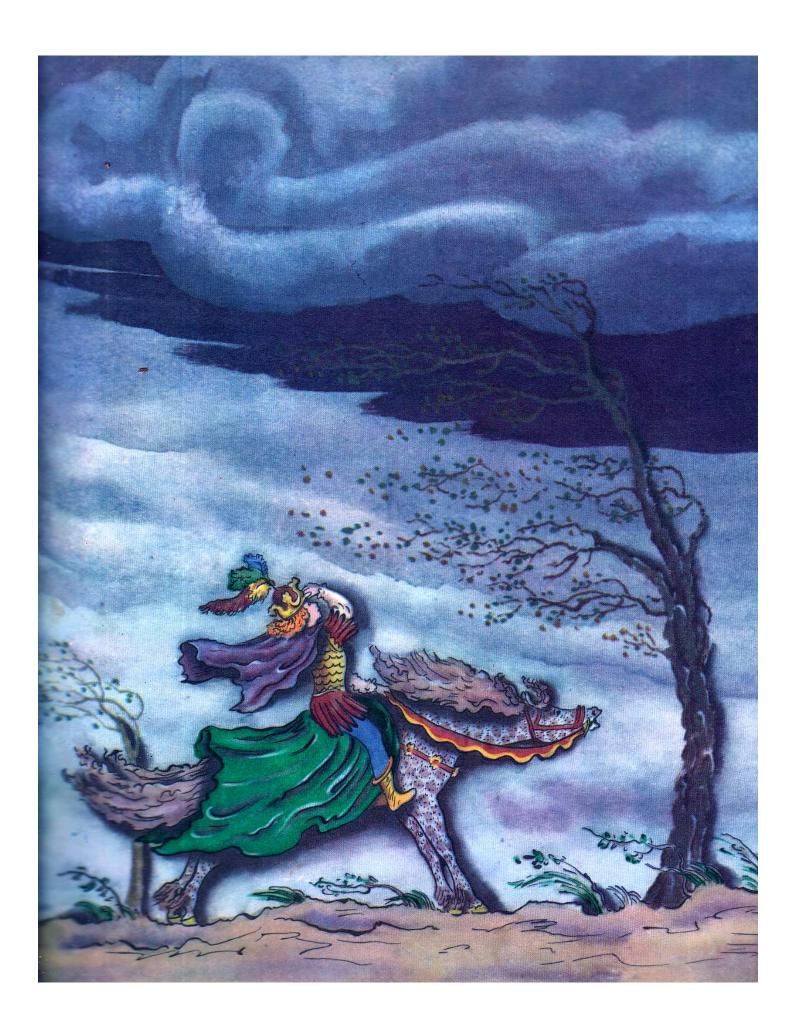
Through the dark night Yelisei, Feeling anything but gay, With a lover's perseverance Waited for the Moon's appearance. "Moon, O Moon, my friend!" he said, "Gold of horn and round of head, From the darkest shadows rising, With your eye the world apprizing, You whom stars with love regard As you mount your nightly guard! Surely you'll not grudge an answer? Tell me, did you ever chance to See the Princess I revere? I'm her fiancé." "O dear!" Said the Moon in consternation, "No, I have not seen the maiden.



On my round I only go
When it is my turn, you know.
It would seem that I was resting
When she passed." "How very vexing!"
Cried aloud Prince Yelisei.
But the Moon went on to say:
"Wait a minute! I suggest you
Have the Wind come to the rescue.
Call him now! It's worth a try.
And cheer up a bit! Goodbye!"

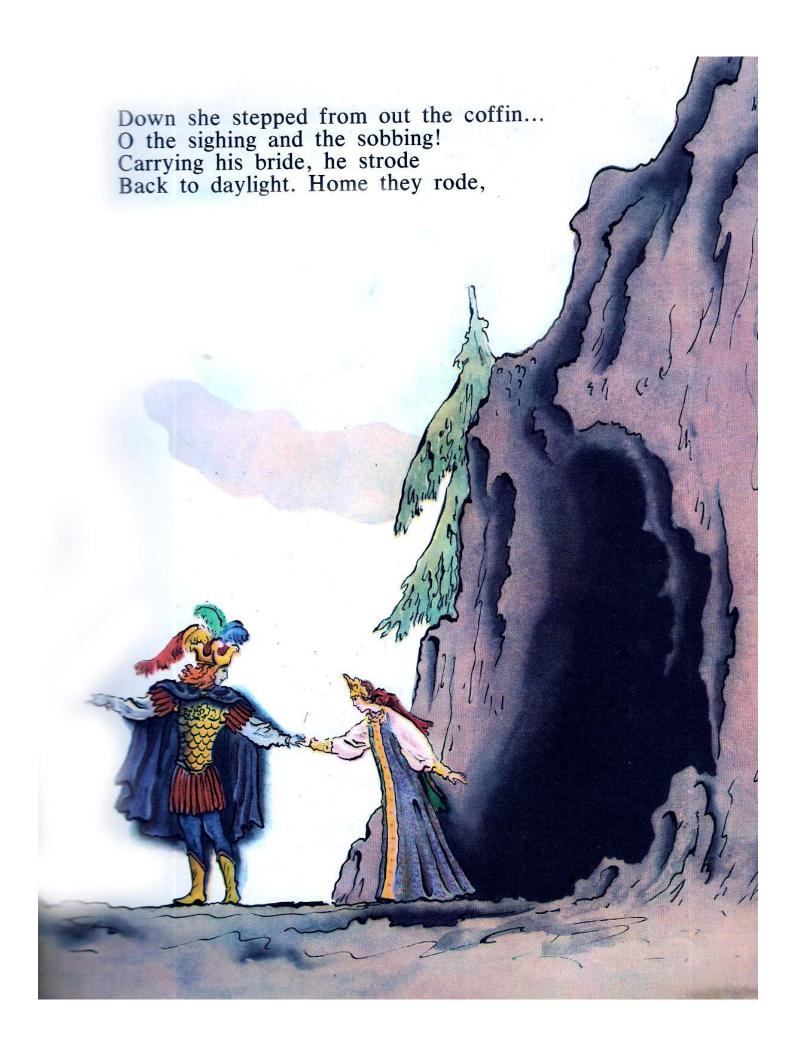


Yelisei, not losing courage, To the Wind's abode now hurried. "Wind, O Wind! Lord of the sky, Herding flocks of clouds on high, Stirring up the dark-blue ocean, Setting all the air in motion, Unafraid of anyone Saving God in heaven alone! Surely you'll not grudge an answer? Tell me, did you ever chance to See the Princess I revere? I'm her fiancé." "O hear!" Said the Wind in turmoil blowing. "Where a quiet stream is flowing Stands a mountain high and steep In it lies a cavern deep; In this cave in shadows dismal Sways a coffin made of crystal. Hung by chains from pillars six. Round it barren land in which No man ever meets another. In that tomb your bride discover!"



With a howl the Wind was gone. Yelisei wept loud and long. To the barren land he journeyed Desperately, sadly yearning Once again to see his bride. On he rode. A mountain high Rose before him, soaring steeply From a land laid waste completely. At its foot—an entrance dim. Yelisei went quickly in. There, he saw, in shadows dismal Swayed a coffin made of crystal Where the Princess lay at rest In the deep sleep of the blest. And the Prince in tears dissolving Threw himself upon the coffin... And it broke! The maiden straight Came to life, sat up, in great Wonder looked about and yawning As she set her bed see-sawing Said with pretty arms outstretched: "Gracious me! How long I've slept!"





Making pleasant conversation Till they reached their destination. Swiftly rumour spread around: "The Princess is safe and sound!"



It so happened the Tsaritsa
In her room was idly seated
By her magic looking-glass
And to pass the time did ask:
"Who in all the world is fairest
And has beauty of the rarest?"
Said the mirror in reply:
"You are fair, I can't deny,
But the Princess is the fairest
And her beauty is the rarest!"
The Tsaritsa leapt and smashed
On the floor her looking-glass,
Rushing to the door she saw the
Fair young Princess walk towards her.



Overcome by grief and spite,
The Tsaritsa died that night.
From the grave where she was buried
To a wedding people hurried,
For the good Prince Yelisei
Wed his Princess that same day.
Never since the World's creation
Was there such a celebration;
I was there, drank mead and yet
Barely got my whiskers wet.





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А. Пушкин СКАЗКА О МЕРТВОЙ ЦАРЕВНЕ И О СЕМИ БОГАТЫРЯХ на английском языке